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background notes

Fiji

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Official Name: Fiji

PROFILE

People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*—Fijian(s). **Population** (1985): 677,000. **Annual growth rate** (1985): 2.1%. **Ethnic groups:** Indian 50%, Fijian 45%, Europeans, other Pacific Islanders, overseas Chinese 5%. **Religions:** Christian, Hindu, Muslim. **Languages:** English (official), Fijian, Hindustani. **Education:** *Attendance*—95% (6–13 yrs.). *Literacy*—80%. **Health:** *Infant mortality rate*—29/1,000. *Life expectancy*—72 yrs. **Work force** (176,000, 1979): *Agriculture*—43.8% *Industry*—15.6%.

Geography

Area: 18,376 sq. km. (7,055 sq. mi.); about the size of Massachusetts. **Cities:** *Capital*—Suva (pop. 71,000). *Other cities*—Lautoka, Nadi, Labasa, Ba, Nausori. **Terrain:** Varied. **Climate:** Tropical maritime.

Government

Type: Parliamentary democracy. **Independence:** October 10, 1970. **Constitution:** October 10, 1970.

Branches: *Executive*—British monarch (chief of state), represented by a governor general; prime minister (head of government); Cabinet. *Legislative*—bicameral Parliament (52-member elected House of Representatives, 22-member appointed Senate). *Judicial*—Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, Privy Council, Magistrates Courts.

Political parties: Alliance Party, National Federation Party, Fijian Nationalist Party, Western United Front, Fiji Labour Party. **Suffrage:** Universal adult.

Administrative subdivisions: 4 divisions.

Flag: Light blue with Union Jack in top left corner and Fijian coat of arms centered on right.

Economy

GDP (1984): $1.230 billion. **Annual growth rate:** (1984) 15.1%. **Per capita income** (1984): $1,086. **Avg. inflation rate** (1984): 5.3%.

Natural resources: Timber, fish, gold, copper.

Agriculture: *Products*—sugar, copra, bananas, ginger.

Industry: *Types*—sugar refining, tourism, gold, lumber, small industries.

Trade (1984): *Exports*—$279.4 million: sugar, copra, gold. *Imports*—$487 million: fuels, machinery. *Major partners*—Australia, New Zealand, Japan, UK, Singapore, US.

Official exchange rate (1984): F$1 = US$.9250, based on a basket of currencies.

Economic aid received: *Total aid* (1983)—$33 million. *Principal bilateral aid donors*—Australia ($7.8 million, 1984), New Zealand ($5.3 million, 1984), UK ($2.4 million, 1984). *Multilateral aid sources*—Asian Development Bank ($49 million total cumulative loan commitment as of 1984, $490,000 technical assistance in 1984), UN Development Program ($860,000, 1984), EC ($4.4 million, 1984). *US aid* (1984)—$1.270 million. The US does not currently have a bilateral aid program with Fiji; a regionwide program channels development funds to governments and regional institutions through private and voluntary agencies on a cofinancing basis. A bilateral AID agreement between the US and Fiji is expected to be concluded in FY 1986.

Membership in International Organizations

UN and several of its specialized and related agencies, South Pacific Forum, Commonwealth of Nations, Asian Development Bank, South Pacific Commission, South Pacific Bureau for Economic Cooperation (SPEC), Pacific Islands Conference, Pacific Islands Development Program, associate member of Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). A regional institution, the University of the South Pacific, is headquartered in Suva.

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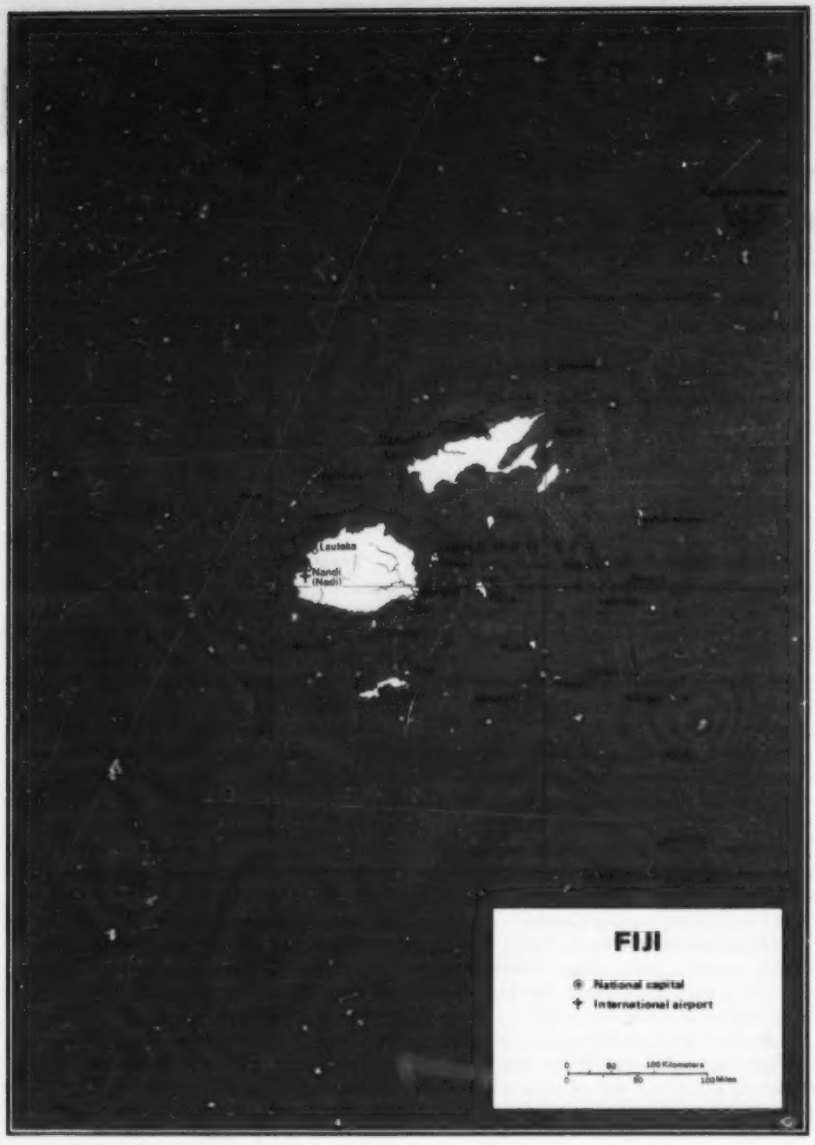

GEOGRAPHY

Fiji comprises a group of volcanic islands in the South Pacific lying about 4,450 kilometers (2,775 mi.) southwest of Honolulu, 2,730 kilometers (1,700 mi.) northeast of Sydney, Australia, and 1,770 kilometers (1,100 mi.) north of Auckland, New Zealand. Its 322 islands range in size from the 10,388 square kilometers (4,011 sq. mi.) of Viti Levu, on which Suva is located, to mere rocks a few square meters in area. Just over 100 of the islands are inhabited.

The larger islands are mountainous, some rising abruptly from the shore to heights of 1,200 meters (4,000 ft.) or more. On the windward (southeastern) side, where rainfall is heavy (up to 305 cm. or 120 in. annually), the islands are covered with dense, tropical forests. Interior lowlands, which have less timber, are sheltered by the mountains, and have a well-marked dry season favorable to crops such as sugar.

PEOPLE

More than half of Fiji's population live on the island coasts, either in Suva, the capital, or in smaller urban centers. The interior is sparsely populated because of its rough terrain.

Indigenous Fijians are a mixture of Polynesian and Melanesian, resulting from the original migrations to the South Pacific many centuries ago. The Indian population has grown rapidly from the 60,000 indentured laborers, who were brought from India between 1879 and 1916 to work in the sugarcane fields. Unlike the native Fijians, who live throughout the country, the Indo-Fijians reside primarily near the urban centers and in the cane-producing areas of the two main islands.

Virtually all indigenous Fijians are Christian, 78% of them Methodist. Roman Catholics account for about 8.5% of the population; nearly half are part European or Chinese. Other Christian denominations in Fiji are Anglican, Seventh-day Adventist, Presbyterian, Mormon, and Christian Brethren. About 80% of the Indo-Fijians are Hindu; the rest are Muslim.

English is the official language; Bauan, a Fijian dialect, is spoken by most indigenous Fijians. Hindustani, a dialect of Hindi, is spoken by most Indians.

HISTORY

Despite evidence that Fiji has been inhabited for more than 2,500 years, little is known of its history before the coming of the Europeans. In earlier times, the Fijian islands were known as the "Cannibal Islands"; today's Fijians, with their open, friendly ways, bear little resemblance to their warlike forebears.

The first known European to sight the Fiji islands was the Dutchman Abel Tasman in 1643. European missionaries, whalers, traders, and deserters settled during the first half of the 19th century. Their corrupting influence caused increasingly serious wars to flare up among the native Fijian confederacies. In 1871, the Europeans in Fiji (about 2,000) established an administration under Ratu Seru Cakobau, who had become paramount chief of Eastern Viti Levu some years before. Chaos followed until a convention of chiefs ceded Fiji unconditionally to the United Kingdom on October 10, 1874.

The pattern of colonialism in Fiji during the following century was similar to that in other British possessions: the pacification of the countryside, the spread of plantation agriculture, and the introduction of Indian indentured labor. Many traditional institutions, including

the system of communal land ownership, were maintained.

Fijian soldiers fought for the United Kingdom during both World Wars. The United States maintained military forces and installations in Fiji during World War II, but, on the whole, the war did not seriously affect the country.

In April 1970, a constitutional conference in London agreed that Fiji should become a fully sovereign and independent nation within the Commonwealth on October 10, 1970.

GOVERNMENT

The governor general, appointed by the British monarch, in turn appoints as prime minister the leader of the majority party in the House of Representatives. On the recommendation of the prime minister, the governor general also appoints the Cabinet, composed of the attorney general and 12 ministers. Twenty-two senators are appointed for 6-year terms; half are appointed every 3 years. Eight are nominated by the Council of Chiefs, 7 by the prime minister, 6 by the leader of the opposition, and 1 by the Council of Rotuma (a small northern island peopled by Polynesians).

Under the constitution, the House of Representatives has 12 Fijians, 12 Indians, and 3 general members elected on communal rolls; 10 Fijians, 10 Indians, and 5 general members are elected on national rolls. The general communal roll consists of electors—mainly Europeans and Chinese—who are not eligible on the Fijian and Indian rolls. On the national roll, members of all ethnic groups vote together.

The independent judiciary includes the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court, presided over by a chief justice appointed by the governor general. An ombudsman investigates complaints concerning the actions of governmental authorities. A commissioner appointed by the prime minister heads each of Fiji's four divisions.

Principal Government Officials

Chief of State—Queen Elizabeth II
Governor General—Ratu Sir Penaia K. Ganilau
Prime Minister—Ratu Sir Kamisese K.T. Mara
Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs—Hon. Narsi Raniga

Fiji maintains an embassy in the United States at 2233 Wisconsin Ave., NW., Suite 240, Washington, D.C. 20007 (tel. 202-337-8320). Fiji's mission to the UN is located at 1 UN Plaza, 26th Floor, New York, N.Y. 10017 (tel. 212-355-7316). A consulate general is at Suite 316, Financial Center, 3701 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, California.

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Fiji's transition to independence was achieved peacefully by the citizens of this multiracial nation. Although there are unresolved racial tensions between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, the two major political parties and Fiji's political and social leaders have succeeded in mitigating those tensions and preventing disorder.

One of the main issues of contention is land tenure. About 83% of the land in Fiji, much of it not arable, is owned by indigenous Fijians and cannot be alienated. It is administered on behalf of village groups (*mataqalis*) by the Native Land Trust Board, an agency of the government. Indo-Fijians, who are the major cultivators of sugar, are unable to purchase the land they till but must lease it. The leases are generally for 10 years, although they are usually renewed for two 10-year extensions. Many Indo-Fijians argue that these terms do not provide them with adequate security and have pressed for 30-year leases.

Fiji held its third general election in July 1982. Despite accusations that campaign rhetoric and tactics were more divisive than in previous elections, the vote took place without violence or major charges of fraud. The Alliance Party, headed by Ratu Sir Kamisese K.T. Mara, was returned to power but now enjoys only a 2-seat majority in the House of Representatives, rather than the 12-seat margin it had gained in the 1977 elections.

Among developing nations, Fiji's accomplishments over the 13 years since independence are remarkable. The government has dedicated itself to economic and social progress, and the country has made real advances in the fields of education, agriculture, health, and nutrition. Individual liberties are safeguarded, and a solid democratic tradition of government has been established. In the area of human rights, Fiji has been singled out by Amnesty International for its complete lack of abuses against the person.

Travel Notes

Customs: Passports, but not visas, are required of American citizens visiting Fiji. Visitors can be issued a permit to stay in Fiji for up to 6 months upon presenting an onward or return ticket and evidence of sufficient funds to cover the period of stay. Immunization against cholera or yellow fever may be required of travelers coming from an infected area.

Climate and clothing: Climate is tropical, with high humidity, an average temperature of 25°C (78°F), and little seasonal change. Rainfall averages 100 cm. (40 in.) annually in western Fiji and 300 cm. (120 in.) in Suva. Dress is generally casual.

Health: Fiji is free from most tropical diseases, including malaria. Health care is adequate for routine medical problems. Drinking water is safe in all cities and major tourist resorts.

Telecommunications: Domestic and international telephone and telegraph services are available. Fiji is 17 standard time zones ahead of eastern standard time.

Transportation: Flights are scheduled regularly form Fiji's international airport at Nadi from Australia, New Zealand, North and South America, and a number of Pacific islands. Within Fiji, small planes fly frequently to all major centers. Taxis are plentiful in the urban areas. Rental cars are available.

ECONOMY

Sugar is the traditional mainstay of Fiji's economy, accounting for 55.7% of exports in 1984, providing 7.5% of the gross domestic product (GDP), and employing 42,000 people. Sugarcane is grown and cut by some 21,000 independent small farmers, who sell their crop to the Fiji Sugar Corporation for processing and export. The largest market is the European Community (EC), followed by New Zealand, Malaysia, and Singapore. Agricultural diversification is being encouraged, with emphasis on cocoa, rice, and cereals. Efforts are being made to increase cattle raising for dairy products and beef. The fishing industry is being expanded, and installation of a cannery has boosted tuna earnings. Large-scale pine planting is expected to surpass sugar in importance by the end of the 1980s.

Tourism is a second vital element in Fiji's economy. In 1984, foreign exchange earnings from tourism stood at

Further Information

These titles are provided as a general indication of material published on this country. The Department of State does not endorse unofficial publications.

Brown, Stanley. *Men From Under the Sky, the Arrival of Westerners in Fiji.* Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1973.

Handbook of Fiji. 4th ed. Sydney: Pacific Publications, 1972.

Prasad, Shiu. *Indian Indentured Workers in Fiji.*

Roth, G.K. *Fijian Way of Life.* 2d ed. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Shadbolt, Maurice and Olaf Ruhen. *Isles of the South Pacific.* Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1971.

Suva: South Pacific Social Sciences Association, 1974.

$155 million as opposed to $111 million from sugar. Visitor arrivals in 1984 exceeded 235,000. Australia continues to provide nearly 50% of visitors to Fiji, followed by the United States, New Zealand, Canada, and Japan. During 1984, 37,200 U.S. visitors arrived in Fiji.

Fiji's mineral industry contributes only 1% of the GDP. Gold is the major product, accounting for more than half the value of total mineral production. Declining quality of accessible ore and price sensitivity cloud the future of the gold industry. Large, low-grade copper deposits have been located, but immediate exploitation is unprofitable because of low world prices. Oil exploration has begun, but test holes drilled so far have proved dry.

As a small nation, Fiji must import a wide variety of goods. A regular and increasing trade deficit has resulted, offset to some extent by earnings from tourism.

Industrial development is proceeding, primarily through the expansion of light manufacturing. New projects in recent years have included a brewery, a shoe factory, a feed mill, and a satellite communications station. Spending on infrastructure, particularly roads and telecommunications, has remained heavy. The Government of Fiji encourages local and foreign investment in hope of promoting development and providing industrial jobs.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Since independence, Fiji has emerged as a leader among South Pacific states, a fact that has been reflected in its foreign policy. Regional cooperation has been its most prominent theme. Another priority, safeguarding economic interests abroad, has involved extensive negotiations on sugar exports. Fiji was active among the group of 46 African, Pacific, and Caribbean nations that concluded an agreement giving them special access to EC markets for specified goods.

Fiji became the 127th UN member on October 13, 1970. It participates actively in the United Nations and in many UN specialized agencies, some of which maintain regional headquarters in Suva. Fiji's contributions to peacekeeping in the Middle East and Africa are unique for a nation of its size. Fiji maintains a 600-member battalion with UN forces in Lebanon and contributes a 500-member battalion to the multinational force and observers in the Sinai. In addition, Fiji responded to a Commonwealth request in 1980 and sent observers to the elections in Zimbabwe.

Fiji has high commissions in London, Canberra, and Wellington and embassies in Brussels, Tokyo, and Washington.

U.S.-FIJIAN RELATIONS

Fiji and the United States have full diplomatic relations. Fiji's Embassy in Washington, D.C. was officially opened by Vice President George Bush in October 1985.

The United States and Fiji enjoy excellent relations. Prime Minister Mara was received at the White House in October 1984, and Secretary of State Shultz visited Fiji briefly in July 1985. Fiji has expressed interest in attracting U.S. investment.

Suva is the headquarters for the USAID regional development office, serving the entire region. In addition, about 130 Peace Corps volunteers are engaged in such fields as primary and secondary education, forestry, agriculture, fisheries, medicine, and rural community development. In 1985, the United States provided $1.5 million in disaster relief funds to Fiji. A bilateral aid agreement between the United States and Fiji is expected to be concluded in FY 1986.

Principal U.S. Officials

Ambassador—C. Edward Dillery
Deputy Chief of Mission—Edric Sherman
Public Affairs Officer—Leslie McBee
AID Regional Development Officer—William Paupe
Peace Corps Director—Stanford Greene
Consular Officer—Micaela Cella

The U.S. Embassy in Fiji is located on Loftus Street, Suva (tel. 23031). Mailing address: American Embassy, P.O. Box 218, Suva, Fiji. ■

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